CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Southern Montana Telephone Utility Easement
Proposed Implementation Date:	August 15, 2008
Proponent:	Southern Montana Telephone Company
Location:	Sections 25 & 35 T1S - R15W, Sections 2, 10, 15, & 22, T2S – R 15W, Section 16, T3S – R15W, Sections 9, 16, & 28, T4S – R15W, Section 28, T2S – R16W, Section 22 & 23 T4S – R16W
County:	Beaverhead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proposed action is installing an underground telecommunications cable through a new right-of-way corridor along existing highway corridors near Wisdom Montana. The purpose is to upgrade their current facilities and services to the Wisdom exchange serving area in and around Wisdom. The improvements would offer state –of –the-art telecommunications toll and distribution facilities, as well as future growth capabilities for the company and the community.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

A field review was conducted in June 2008 by DNRC Unit Manager Tim Egan.

Letters were sent to the following seeking comments for the proposed telecommunications cable installation:

DNRC, Archaeologist, P. Rennie

Montana Natural Heritage Program

The following Lessees; Crane Ranches, Jack Hirschy Livestock Inc, Roger Ball, Ralph Huntly & Sons, and Forty Bar Ranch

. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Beaverhead Conservation District (310 permits)

Montana Department of Transportation (right of way agreement)

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action Alternative: Grant Southern Montana Telephone Company a 20 foot wide easement over approximately 18.839 acres of State land in thirteen different sections in Beaverhead County near Wisdom, MT. for the purpose of installing an underground telecommunications cable.

No Action Alternative: The State would not grant an easement to Southern Montana Telephone Company. The proponents would be required to find an alternative route, or not install the underground telecommunications cable.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:
Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The footprint of this project is small, 20 feet with in the highway right-of-way. The soils where the disturbance will occur have been disturbed in the past and have regenerated with native grass. There are no unusual geologic features on these sections and no long term effects are expected. Disturbed areas will be seeded with grass seed.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:
Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

The proposed action will cross perennial streams on some of the sections. Southern Montana Telephone Co has applied and was granted 310 permits for these crossings. Mitigation measures are described in the permits. No long term effects to water quality are expected from this project.

6. AIR QUALITY:
What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

NONE

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:
What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

There have been no rare or endangered plant species identified in the project area. The area has been disturbed in the past and the disturbed areas have re-vegetated nicely. There will be some new vegetative disturbance associated with this project during the installation of the telecommunications cable. Disturbed areas will be re-seeded with a grass seed mixture upon completion of the project. The site will also be monitored for weed control for a period of three years.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

A variety of big game, small mammals, raptors, songbirds and grouse potentially use this area. Due to the short duration of the installation period, the location being along the highway right –of- way and the cable being buried, minimal impacts to wildlife are anticipated.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:
Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

No threatened or endangered species have been documented within the project area. Occasional use of the area by gray wolf could potentially occur but is generally considered outside of their normal occupied habitat. Preferred habitat for lynx and wolverine, greater sage grouse and arctic grayling is not present within the project area however all these species could be seen crossing one of the highways where the cable would be buried. Because the cable will be underground it will not impair the movement of any of these species. No effects to wildlife are foreseen.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A search of the site was completed by Ethos Consultants (John and Anne Brumley). The results of the search are forth coming. DNRC archeologist Patrick Rennie has been contacted and will examine the results of the survey.

11. AESTHETICS:
Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The proposed project is located in a sparsely populated area. The disturbance will be along an existing highway, and ground disturbance will be minimal, and of short duration. Once the disturbed areas are re-vegetated there will be no long term effect to the aesthetics of the surrounding area.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:
Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

NONE

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:
List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

NONE

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:
Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

NONE

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

NONE

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

NONE

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

NONE

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

NONE

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

NONE

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

NONE

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

There will be no measurable cumulative impacts related to population and housing due to the relatively small nature of this project.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

NONE

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

NONE

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The proposed project has provided $650.00 of application fees, and would provide an additional $9,419.50 of revenue to the associated trusts. (18.839 acres x $500.00/ acres) In addition the project would provide state of the art telecommunications to the Wisdom area which could provide additional commerce to this isolated area.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Tim Egan	**Date:**	June 17, 2008
	Title:	Dillon Unit Manager		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected the proposed alternative and recommend the easement applications be presented to the Board of land Commissioners for approval.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Significant impacts are not expected to occur as a result of the proposed activity. The telephone line will be installed along an existing road corridor and consequently the site has been previously disturbed. There will be temporary and short term disturbance of vegetation and during the installation process but natural re-vegetation is expected to occur as it has in the past. Stream crossings are subject to 310 permits issued by the Conservation District and the easement will require compliance with the conditions of the permit.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis		

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Garry Williams		
	Title:	Area manager, Central Land Office		
Signature:	/S/ Garry Williams		**Date**:	6/26/2008

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